

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 18, 23, 24, 30, 33 and 35 have been rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as anticipated by EP 1,039,216. Claims 19-22, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 36 and 37 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over EP 1,039,216 in view of JP 10-188641. Withdrawal of this rejection is appropriate, as explained below.

EP 1,039,216 was published on September 27, 2000. The present application has a filing date of December 4, 2001. However, it claims benefit of a priority date of November 30, 1999 based on German application no. 199 57 611.4. Applicants wish to rely on that priority date. Accordingly, an English translation of the priority German application is submitted herewith.

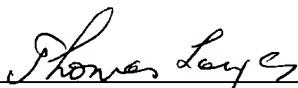
Because the priority date of November 30, 1999 precedes the September 27, 2000 effective date of EP 1,039,216 as prior art, the latter is not an effective reference against the present application. Accordingly, the rejection under 35 USC 102 as well as the rejection under 35 USC 103, both of which rely on the EP document, must be withdrawn.

It is noted that EP 1,039,216 appears to correspond to USP 6,523,966 B1. Its U.S. filing date (and its effective date as a prior art reference) of March 17, 2000 is also after the priority date to which the present application is entitled.

Based on all of the above, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in proper condition for allowance. Prompt and favorable action to this effect and early passing of this application to issue are respectfully solicited.

It is believed that no fees or charges are required at this time in connection with the present application. However, if any fees or charges are required at this time, they may be charged to our Patent and Trademark Office Deposit Account No. 03-2412.

Respectfully submitted,
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